

In this column I'd like to take a little break from my normal shameless promotion of the College, and write about something very near to my heart that is so very important to local communities.

Recently one of the local reporters who covers Neosho County Community College, Adrienne Wahl, was in a terrible automobile accident. She was driving back from covering area basketball games late at night and was in a terrible wreck. As I write this she is stable, but faces a long journey to complete recovery. The thoughts and prayers of the employees of NCCC are with you Adrienne.

Adrienne has the unenviable task of sitting through hours of our monthly NCCC Board of Trustees meetings to bring her readers the news from the College. The meetings, while necessary and informative, are often not too exciting. She goes for you, the local citizen, to give you an unbiased relaying of the decisions and direction of the college, because I'll bet you have better things to do on a Tuesday night than listening to me droll on and on about Institutional Effectiveness, Learning Outcomes, and progress on our Energy Performance Contract. But as a fully-informed member of the community, you should know what is going on at your local community college.

Local journalism and local newspapers have a special place in my heart. My love of local journalism started in high school where I was a photographer and reporter. I was on the floor and took the pictures when our girls' basketball team won the state championship my senior year. That was awesome! I did the fluff pieces on the band concerts and the plays, but occasionally I did hard news. I even got called to the principal's office once for a story I wrote over how the honors program at the high school was handled. It was doubly awkward and scary as I had never been called to the principal before, and my mother was the principal's secretary. But, we stood by our story because it was true.

When it came time to design my high school class ring, I chose choral music (I was an All-State Choir member) on one side, and journalism for the other. That symbol is a lamp and under the lamp, one word – Truth. That word still speaks to me today. I think truth is something today's opinion-based journalism, if you can use that adjective and still call it journalism, should return to. But I digress.

I went on to earn two degrees in broadcast journalism and mass communications. As part of those degrees I had to intern with companies in the industry. One of those unpaid internships was with my own hometown paper. It was your typical small town paper, with a very small staff where everyone did everything. They let me take photos and develop them in the dark room (I think I just dated myself), many of which appeared in the paper. They had me write stories and even gave me a column I named, "Brian's Brainstorms." It was an awesome experience.

(Reading those columns now, they were pretty bad, but, hey, I was 19 at the time. The Editor there helped me polish them, but there is an old saying about some objects you can't polish effectively. The Editor of this paper probably doesn't want me to use that word in a family newspaper.)

I worked hard for the paper but took real pride in seeing what we produced every day, six days a week. I did not get a salary, but what I did receive was wonderful experiences. And I received an appreciation of local newspapers.

I know firsthand how hard journalists and editors work to put out a local paper. It is long hours, tight deadlines, and low pay. It's sitting through a four-hour local government meeting to get 10 minutes of news. It's running from event to event, snapping some pics, then running back to get the copy in before deadline. It's occasionally making a mistake and hearing about it for YEARS afterward, because all of

your mistakes are very public and long-lasting. Everything from spelling errors, to wrong names in pictures, to errors of fact, some people have long memories and are not quick to forgive. It's being accused of bias, even when you worked hard to try to remove any subjective words. I especially liked it when both sides of an issue accused us of bias on the same article. That's when you know you did the issue justice.

But I also know how vital local journalism and a local newspaper is to a thriving community. They keep us informed about what is going on and events to attend. They are part of the Fourth Estate that helps provide transparency with local government, like your local community college for instance. They provide a platform for readers' opinions through Letters to the Editor. They are entertaining and informative. They are essential to an informed citizenry, which is essential to a fully functioning democracy.

For next month's column I'll get back to shameless promotion of NCCC – such as our upcoming open house for the new Ross Lane facility featuring our indoor practice facility on January 17<sup>th</sup> from 4:00pm to 6:00pm. (Ok I managed to get some self-promotion in here.)

But for now, let me say this - a big thank you to The Chanute Tribune, The Erie Record, The Ottawa Herald, The Anderson County Review, and every other local paper that covers Neosho County Community College and the hundreds of other locally important institutions, events, and agencies. You are appreciated and valued.

Get to feeling better Adrienne, and thank you for all you do for the College, your community, and your paper.

If you have any questions about this column or anything else, please contact me at [binbody@neosho.edu](mailto:binbody@neosho.edu).